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THE AMERICAN PHILATELIST

MONTHLY JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN PHILATELIC SOCIETY



BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA

The Story Behind the 1950 Stamp



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BY CHARLES M. POSNER

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THE AMERICAN PHILATELIST

Since 1887 — The Premier Philatelic Magazine in the Nation

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1950s

== CATALOGING U.S. STAMPS ==

BY CHARLES M. POSNER

Boy Scouts of America (Scott 995)



United States 3-cent Boy Scouts of America commemorative stamp.

The Making of the Stamp

The story of a stamp to salute the Boy Scouts of America begins in 1935, the year of its silver anniversary and the year chosen to convene its first national jamboree. An outbreak of polio forced the cancellation of the 1935 event by President Franklin D. Roosevelt through a presidential proclamation. The rally was rescheduled to 1937, two years later. At that time more than 27,000 Scouts, representing 536 councils, descended on Washington to camp in a tent city stretching from the Washington Monument to Arlington Park and along the banks of the Potomac.

There had been hopes that the United States Post Office Department would have seen fit to issue a commemorative stamp, but the cancellation of the 1935 jubilee put an end to that aspiration. Pressure was on again in 1937. If the Dutch government could issue a series of three stamps (Scott 206–208) to mark the fifth World Scout Jamboree held at Vogelenzang, Bloemendaal, that year, it was argued that the United States could issue at least one commemorative stamp in honor of its first jubilee. But 1937 marked the 27th

anniversary of the Boy Scouts of America, and even though the post office had not yet ruled out issuing stamps that did not conform to celebrating golden anniversaries and diamond jubilees, no stamp was forthcoming. The national organization was disappointed. Leading members were determined not to let the opportunity slip by again.

For that and other reasons, in 1949, Harry J. Thorsen, one of the founders of the Scouts on Stamps Society International (SOSI), made a trip to New York City to call on Arthur Aloys Schuck, the chief Scout executive of the Boy Scouts of America,

to ask him to promote the issuing of a stamp in 1950 to mark the 40th anniversary of Scouting. Thorsen reported that Schuck showed “little interest, and suggested that perhaps this was something volunteers could promote, rather than the national headquarters of the B.S.A.” The very active Troop 24 of Minneapolis took up the call.

Meanwhile, Thorsen’s boss, E. G. Rice, who was engaged in preparing a manual of postal information for the envelope industry, raised the matter with Postmaster General Jesse Donaldson during one of his frequent trips to the U.S. Post Office Depart-

3-CENT BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA COMMEMORATIVE STAMP

Date of issue: June 30, 1950
First-day site: Valley Forge, Pennsylvania
First-day covers serviced: 622,972
Scott catalog number: 995
Designer: Boy Scouts of America and Charles Chickering
Modeler: Charles Chickering
Vignette engraver: Charles Brooks
Frame engraver: Edward Helmuth
Letter engraver: Edward Helmuth
Color: Sepia (Scott); brown (U.S. Post Office Department)
Format: 200-subject, electric-eye convertible type plates, divided into post office panes of 50 stamps each by horizontal and vertical gutters — arranged 10 horizontal by 5 vertical rows of stamps to the pane
Perforation: Gauge 11 x 10.5
Size: 0.84 x 1.44 inches (21.3 x 36.58mm)
Printing: Bureau of Engraving and Printing on Stickney rotary press
Quantity: 131,635,000
Varieties: Misperforations (vertical) and solvent smudge from printing process



Poster for the 40th anniversary of the Boy Scouts of America (left) and sketch by the Boy Scouts of America that led to the design for the issued stamp. Images courtesy Forrest Ellis Files, American Philatelic Research Library.

ment. Unlike Schuck, Donaldson was more than welcoming and asked Rice to inform the national office of the Boy Scouts of America that if they were to contact the department armed with ideas for a design of such a stamp, they could expect favorable consideration.

This time Schuck took action. In mid-March a representative of the Boy Scouts of America visited Washington to present a variety of suggested design ideas for the proposed stamp, stressing their wish that the color should be khaki brown. The press speculated that either Daniel Carter Beard (1850–1941) or James Edward West (1876–1948), two of the key early promoters of the organization, would be portrayed on the stamp. After all, Juliette Gordon Low (1860–1927), the founder of the Girl Scouts of America was so honored in 1948 (Scott 974). However, none of the proposed vignettes prepared by Scout leaders included likenesses of either man, despite the fact that 1950 marked the centenary of Beard’s birth.

Nevertheless, Charles Chickering of the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, working from the final sketch of the Boy Scouts of America, and his own wash drawing, submitted only one design. The original sketch prepared by staff members of the Boy Scouts of America featured on its left side three Scout figures and the Statue of Liberty, copied from

a poster issued in 1949 for the “Crusade to Strengthen the Arm of Liberty.”

Chickering left the element of the Scout figures virtually intact. However, he changed almost all the remaining parts of the organization’s proposed design. He shifted the Boy Scouts of America membership badge from the bottom of the vignette to a position midway up the stamp. He transposed the denomination from the top-right corner to the bottom-left corner and relocated the words “Boy Scouts of America” from the bottom panel of the stamp to a position just under the badge. The words “On my honor / I will do my best...” were moved from the center right of the stamp to a position above the badge. “U.S. Postage” was changed to “United States Postage” and placed in a band across the bottom of the stamp. Chickering’s version, while respecting all of the elements of the Boy Scouts of America’s submission, through judicious housekeeping became a much more balanced, intelligible, and integrated design.

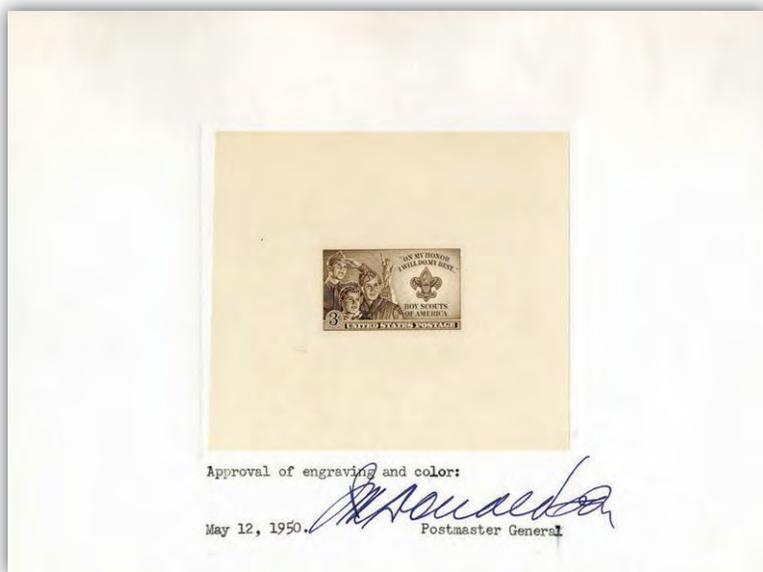
At the beginning of June the postmaster general announced details of the stamp and the date for its issue. The date of the actual foundation of the organization was February 8, 1910, and indeed many events were planned for the week of February 6–12, including the continuation of the “Crusade to Strengthen the Arm of Liberty,” inaugurated the previous year with celebrations in Washington and at Valley Forge. For the stamp, however, Donaldson chose the opening day of the national jamboree to be held at Valley Forge from June 30 until July 6. He said, “Issuance of the Boy Scout stamp is a governmental recognition of the great work Scouting is performing in character building and in guaranteeing a patriotic citizenry for the future.”

The Design

The details of the issued design depict three classes of Scouts: Cub Scouts (ages 8–10) are shown between Boy

PLATE NUMBER REPORT

Plate. No.	Impressions	Printed
24224	112,199	May 29, 1950
24225	112,592	June 1, 1950
24226	None	Not used
24227	112,592	June 1, 1950
24228	112,199	May 29, 1950
24229	119,657	June 5, 1950
24230	119,658	June 5, 1950



The approved die proof for the Boy Scouts of America stamp. Courtesy United States Postal Service, Postmaster General's Collection, Smithsonian National Postal Museum.

Scouts (ages 11–13, represented by the figure at the right), and Explorer Scouts (ages 14 and up, personified by a taller figure on the left shielding his eyes with his left hand). The words “On my honor I will do my best ...,” taken from the opening phrase of the Scout oath, and the legend “Boy Scouts of America” are both in Roman lettering. The words “United States Postage,” located in a panel across the bottom of the stamp, are in reversed Roman. The denomination “3¢” is enclosed in a circle in the lower-left corner.

The original poster from which the likenesses of the three Scouts were taken apparently depicted real people. Given that Chickering respected fully the elements of the poster, there was some fear expressed that, contrary to rules and regulations, real people were to be shown on an American postage stamp. As with the similar case of the 1945 Navy commemorative stamp (Scott 935), the U.S. Post Office Department said that no one could be identified because the faces had been sufficiently altered.

One Scout said, “The guy who designed that stamp overlooked the most important thing on the stamp. He’s got every slogan and motto on that stamp except the one he should have — ‘Be Prepared.’” While the department did not make amends, a distinguished Harvard mathematician in 1953 composed a jaunty song dedicated to the Boy Scouts of America and called it “Be Prepared!” Somehow it was probably not exactly what the disappointed Scout had in mind.

The Subject

In 1950, the Boy Scouts of America could be best described as a home-grown institution representative of the entire nation, religious but non-sectarian, and adapted to the needs and possibilities of each boy. The youngsters were trained in the scout spirit, living the ideals of Scouting: teamwork in the homes, the schools, religious institutions, and the community.

For inexplicable reasons, it has been assumed that the in-

spiration for founding the Boy Scouts of America came principally from the organization established by General (later Baron) Robert Stephenson Smyth Baden-Powell (1857–1941) in Great Britain. Indeed, a myth was perpetuated that American newspaper entrepreneur William Dickson “W.D.” Boyce (1858–1929) lost his way in a typical London fog and was rescued by a Boy Scout, who refused a tip and took him to Scouting headquarters, where he met Baden-Powell. Boyce was so impressed, or so the story goes, that he set up a similar organization when he returned home.

Not only is the myth untrue, but also so is the notion that the British model was adopted by the Americans. First of all, Baden-Powell when he returned to Britain after having been rescued at the siege of Mafeking during the Boer War, set up an organization dedicated to defending passionately the British Empire and combating political groups with which he did not agree. The essence of Baden-Powell’s organization was blind obedience to commands. As he himself wrote, the key to being a Scout is that “A scout obeys orders without question” and the purpose of Scouting is to develop “patient obedience to authority.” Baden-Powell set up a camp modeled on his version of a military bivouac and shortly thereafter in 1908 produced a book *Scouting for Boys*. Interestingly, those sections of the book dedicated to practical and co-operative activities were taken from the work of Ernst Thompson Seton, who set up the Woodcraft Indians organization in Connecticut in 1902.

The purpose of Seton’s organization was to teach boys self-reliance and not blind obedience. The aim was to build on their individual possibilities through working in groups to solve problems. Indeed, Seton later wrote that Baden-Powell had put a good idea to bad use. And it was Seton’s *A Handbook of Woodcraft, Scouting and Life-craft*, rather than Baden-Powell’s book, that transmuted into the *Boy Scout Handbook*.

Unfortunately, fact and myth were confused in the internecine struggles between the returning Boyce, who felt that

an association with Baden-Powell would validate his credentials, and Daniel Carter Beard (who had organized the Sons of Daniel Boone), Seton, and even William Randolph Hearst. Somehow, by February 8, 1910, the various groups had managed to resolve their disagreements, and the Boy Scouts of America was born, incorporating the other organizations dedicated to education through activity. Boyce was able to work with Beard, who was given the title of national Scout commissioner; Seton, who became chief Scout; and Colin Livingstone, who became president.

By that time the organization already had 2,500 leaders from 44 states on its books and had installed James West, a strong advocate of children's rights, as chief executive — on a temporary basis that was to last for 35 years. In 1911, the serving United States President William Howard Taft became the honorary Boy Scouts of America president at the Scout's first annual meeting, held at the White House. Theodore Roosevelt was named the chief Scout citizen, and Gifford Pinchot the chief woodsman.

Quarrels and disputes over the next 10 years led to the formation of breakaway groups and resignations within the organization. However, by the mid 1920s most of the dissident groups had disappeared or had been absorbed into the Boy Scouts of America.

Key to American Scouting was its oath, adopted in 1911, which obliges Scouts "To help other people at all times; to keep myself physically strong, mentally awake and morally straight," and to accept the premise that "Boy Scouts of America believe that no member can grow into the best kind of citizen without recognizing an obligation to God." At the same time West, now given the title of chief Scout executive, sought to broaden the base of the organization far beyond anything imagined by Baden-Powell by securing the support of trade unions.

Over protests, both he and Boyce insisted on the inclusion of blacks, although at first there was de facto segregation in the South. They also encountered temporary problems with some religious organizations, such as the Roman Catholic Church, and over questions related to weapons, conscientious objection, and pacifism. Slowly the organization grew, and new and ancillary bodies such as the Cub Scouts came into being. By 1929, there were 842,540 Scouts, increasing to 1,391,831 in 1939, and more than 2,795,000 by the time the stamp was issued in 1950.

It is impossible to list all of the group's activities, but one can pick out the highlights. In 1913, Scouts served as crowd controllers at the inauguration of Woodrow Wilson, establishing a tradition. They have served in some capacity in every subsequent inauguration. During World War I, Scouts were message runners and coast watchers and sold more than

\$352 million of War Bonds and \$101 million of War Savings stamps. They planted more than 122,000 Boy Scout War Gardens and distributed more than 300 million pieces of government literature.

In 1934, during the Great Depression, President Roosevelt called upon the Scouts to help the distressed and the needy. They collected 1,812,284 items of clothing, household furnishings, foodstuffs, and other supplies.

Programs were introduced for Scouts with disabilities, and other programs were set up for out-of-work scouts, with an emphasis on those living in rural areas. In gratitude, in 1940 the composer Irving Berlin set up a foundation to distribute the royalties from his song "God Bless America" to the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts.

During World War II, scouts collected 30 million pounds of rubber, distributed pledge cards for War Bonds and Savings stamps, collected aluminum and salvage, served as messengers and dispatch bearers, assisted emergency medical



Plate block of the Boy Scouts of America stamp signed by stamp designer Charles Chickering, vignette engraver Charles Brooks, and frame and letter engraver Edward Helmuth. Courtesy John M. Hotchner.

units, and served as fire watchers.

With the advent of the Red Scare in the late 1940s, the euphoria of the immediate post-World War II era was replaced by a period that, according to some, re-emphasized national values and unity, and according to others led to an unbridled xenophobia that threatened civil liberties and even led to the birth of a security state. The Boy Scouts of America could not be immune to these currents, and for that reason from 1949 on emphasized its commitment to freedom and liberty. The choice of the Statue of Liberty as its icon for the "Crusade to Strengthen the Arm of Liberty" was an attempt to create a sense of unity and common purpose. The movement re-affirmed its commitment to the 12 principles of Scouting: trustworthiness, loyalty, helpfulness, friendliness, courtesy, kindness, obedience, cheerfulness, thriftiness, bravery, cleanliness, and the slogan "Do a Good Turn Daily."

The Korean War unleashed a strongly felt sentiment that America was under siege by the godless and power-mad

communists, led by a voracious Soviet Union, with which a nuclear war was seen as a distinct possibility. The Korean War began just three weeks after the jamboree, which still emphasized internationalism. A large contingent from several other countries participated, and the Boy Scouts of America stressed its commitment to world peace.

A snapshot of the Boy Scouts of America as it was in 1950 showed, as the *New York Times* commented, that it was “a mirror of the wide cross-section of the community,” representing all social classes and all religions. There were 2,795,000 Scouts, with 47.1 percent of its activities sponsored by religious organizations, 25 percent by civic organizations, 11.3 percent by community groups, and 16 percent by schools, with the remaining 0.6 percent being sustained by miscellaneous sponsors.

Of interest to philatelists is that one of the many merit badge subjects in the Scout movement was stamp collecting, which the Boy Scouts of America called “the world’s most popular hobby.”

Not only was philately of interest to the Scouting movement, but the Scouting movement was of great interest to philatelists. More than 200 countries have issued stamps featuring Scouts. The first Scouting stamp was issued in 1918 by the new republic of Czechoslovakia, where “Post Ceskych Skautu” mail was delivered by Slovakian Sea Scouts.

In the United States, the 1950 Boy Scouts of America stamp was followed by one marking the movement’s 50th anniversary in 1960 (Scott 1145), and an airmail postal card (UXC7) issued in 1967 commemorating the XII World Scout Jamboree. In 1985, a stamp for the 75th anniversary of the Boy Scouts (Scott 2161) was issued in a block of four honoring American youth organizations. In 2010, the centenary of the Boy Scouts of America was marked by another stamp (Scott 4472), which did

The certified plate proof for the Boy Scouts of America stamp created by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing. The proof bears approval signatures and other markings. Courtesy Smithsonian National Postal Museum.





not include the words “Boy Scouts.” The only reference on the stamp to the Boy Scouts or the centenary is the single word, “SCOUTING.” The stamp, however, was issued at the national Boy Scout jamboree. It has been speculated that the words “Boy Scouts” were omitted because the guideline of the Citizens’ Stamp Advisory Committee that “Stamps or stationery items shall not be issued to honor fraternal, political, sectarian, or service/charitable organizations.”

The Girl Scouts, who had already been honored by the Juliette Low stamp of 1948 (Scott 974), had further philatelic recognition in 1962 (Scott 1199) and again in 1987 (Scott 2251). In 2012, a generic Scouting stamp (Scott 4691) with the silhouette of a girl, similar to the male “Scouting” stamp of 2010, was issued. Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts were together commemorated in the Celebrate the Century series in 1998 (Scott 3183j).

First-Day Ceremony

The issuing of the 1950 postage stamp was one of a series of events concluding the two-year campaign called “Crusade to Strengthen the Arm of Liberty.” During the buildup to the Jamboree during the 1949 anniversary week, President Truman offered lunch to 12 outstanding Scouts, who presented him with the “Report to the Nation” and a scroll listing the achievements of the organization. Earlier in the day they breakfasted with cabinet members, senators, and representatives.

Afterward they traveled to New York for a ceremony at the base of the Statue of Liberty. To give the ceremony an international flavor, the United Nations Boy Scout troop, composed of the sons of United Nations personnel, was in attendance. Meanwhile at Valley Forge, instructors from the Valley Forge Military Academy, aware of the importance of symbolism and continuity, impersonated General Washington (complete with a powdered wig and mounted on a white charger), along with generals von Steuben and Lafayette. These august personages reviewed the nearly 3,500 assembled Boy Scouts.

As part of the campaign, more than 200 smaller versions of the Statue of Liberty, called the “little sisters of liberty,” were cast in stamped copper and placed in parks, capitals, schoolyards, and libraries, on the front lawns of courthouses, and along main streets throughout the country. Some of the plaques read, “With the faith and courage of their forefathers who made possible the freedom of these United States, The Boy Scouts of America dedicate this replica of the Statue of Liberty as a pledge of everlasting fidelity and loyalty.” The ceremony held in Cheyenne, Wyoming, was typical of many organized throughout the country. On May 27, 1950, nearly 1,000 Scouts marched through Cheyenne to the capitol

SKM

H. Approved

to dedicate an eight-foot-tall replica of the statue.

On Friday, June 30, the second U.S. national jamboree opened at an encampment at Valley Forge and ran until the following Thursday, July 6. The guests included President Truman and Dwight Eisenhower in his capacity as president of Columbia University. A *New York Times* reporter described the atmosphere in the 625-acre tent city as “a combination of Coney Island on the Fourth of July and the stock exchange in a bull market.” The camp was divided into 35 sections, each of which had its own gateway consisting of a recognizable symbol of their council or state and each of which was visited by the president touring at a snail’s pace in an open-air limousine.

Despite the fear of a polio epidemic after one Scout died of that disease, the first-day-of-issue ceremony was held as scheduled on Friday, June 30, at 5 p.m. in front of the tent of the national jamboree headquarters. Amory Houghton (1899–1981), the national president of the Boy Scouts of America and chairman of the board of Corning Glass, presided at the ceremony. After his welcoming address, the Madison, Wisconsin, Scout bugle band provided a musical interlude. A prominent rabbi then pronounced the invocation.

On behalf of the U.S. Post Office Department, Assistant Postmaster General Joseph Lawler presented albums containing a pane of stamps autographed by the postmaster general to Houghton; Arthur Aloys Shuck (1895–1963), the chief Scout executive; and other national Scout officials. After Houghton’s acceptance speech on behalf of the recipients, Roy Johnson of Troop 24 of Minneapolis led those assembled in reciting the Scout oath. Not only did Troop 24 play a role in getting the stamp approved, but its members also prepared first-day covers with the slogan “First advocates of the Jamboree stamp.” On their behalf, Johnson was then presented with an album, thus becoming the first Boy Scout to receive the stamp. The proceedings ended with the singing of the national anthem.

After the first-day ceremony, a rally took place in the late

evening. It was the largest youth gathering in American history up to that time. Almost 50,000 Scouts, including representatives from 20 other countries, attended and about another 20,000 gathered on the fringes of the main group. The main event was a 20-minute address by President Truman in his role as honorary president of the Boy Scouts of America in the presence of officials including the governor of Pennsylvania. Truman spoke under a giant 40-foot long Boy Scout emblem flanked by the words “Strengthen” and “Liberty.” Almost blinded by overzealous flash photography, he abandoned his prepared text and spoke extemporaneously. He said the Boy Scouts of America’s work on behalf of peace and humanity was the same “burning faith” that inspired the army of George Washington. He told the Scouts they were lucky to be Americans, well fed and well taken care of. He lamented the fate of young people under communist imperialism and said “we must not return hate for hate.”

John McCullough reporting for the *Philadelphia Inquirer* was less cautious than the president, writing that the gathering was a “ringing challenge and rebuttal to the appeal of communism to world youth” and could not be compared to a recent sordid communist youth rally in Berlin. No Scout was ever made to goose-step to the commands of authoritarian masters.

The Scouting movement took a strong position against racism, and while both white and black Scouts attended, as Henry Sampson recounts, African-Americans nonetheless suffered from prejudice that did not quite seem to be consonant with the many speeches invoking freedom and liberty.

After Truman’s speech, the program concluded with a dimming of the lights and an hour-long pageant about the travails of the Continental Army in 1777 and 1778, called “The Story of Valley Forge,” complete with George Washington upon his white horse standing against what was described as a colorful background. At the conclusion, the Scouts returned to their campsites in torch-led processions.

On Saturday, the five special Jamboree camp post offices’



Official first-day cover for the Boy Scouts of America stamp. Courtesy John M. Hotchner.

stocks of stamps were depleted within two hours.

The next day those attending the Jamboree scattered far and wide, some going to Independence Hall in Philadelphia. Monster campfires and religious services for adherents of all religions were followed by a closing evening convocation with the theme of “freedom of worship.”

At least 52 first-day cover cachet designs were produced. The Boy Scouts of America refused permission for cover designers to use the Scout fleur-de-lis emblem as part of their cachets, reserving the right to have exclusive use of the emblem on covers prepared by their own national supply service. Nonetheless an interesting variety of cachets was created, including the one from Troop 24 of Minneapolis showing the encampment, a design by Dorothy Knapp, and one by James MacAdams on behalf of the SOSSI.



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The Boy Scouts of America article is the second in a series by Charles M. Posner on the nearly 120 United States stamps issued from the 1950s to the mid-1980s. Because of the large number of annual stamp issues, and the detailed information provided, the articles on the stamps below are found online as bonus content on *The AP* page.

Centenary of Kansas City (Scott 994)



Hailing from Kansas City himself, then-Postmaster General Jesse Donaldson (1885–1970) was pleased to announce on March 7, 1950, that a stamp would be issued to commemorate the Gateway to the West – Midwest Centenary. The stamp shows the Kansas City skyline at the top and Westport Landing, from 1850, at the bottom.

Indiana Territory Sesquicentennial (Scott 996)



The request for a stamp celebrating the 150th anniversary of the creation of the Indiana Territory came from several sources. Ultimately, the stamp was issued July 4, 1950. It depicts Governor William Henry Harrison and the first Indiana capitol in Vincennes.

California Statehood Centennial (Scott 997)



As early as 1944 Joseph Russell Knowland (1873–1966), the owner and publisher of the *Oakland Tribune* and promoter of the construction of the San-Francisco-Oakland Bridge, requested that Californians should begin to think about how to celebrate three upcoming centennials. The centennial stamp was issued September 9, 1950, and pictures a gold miner, pioneers, and the *SS Oregon*.

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